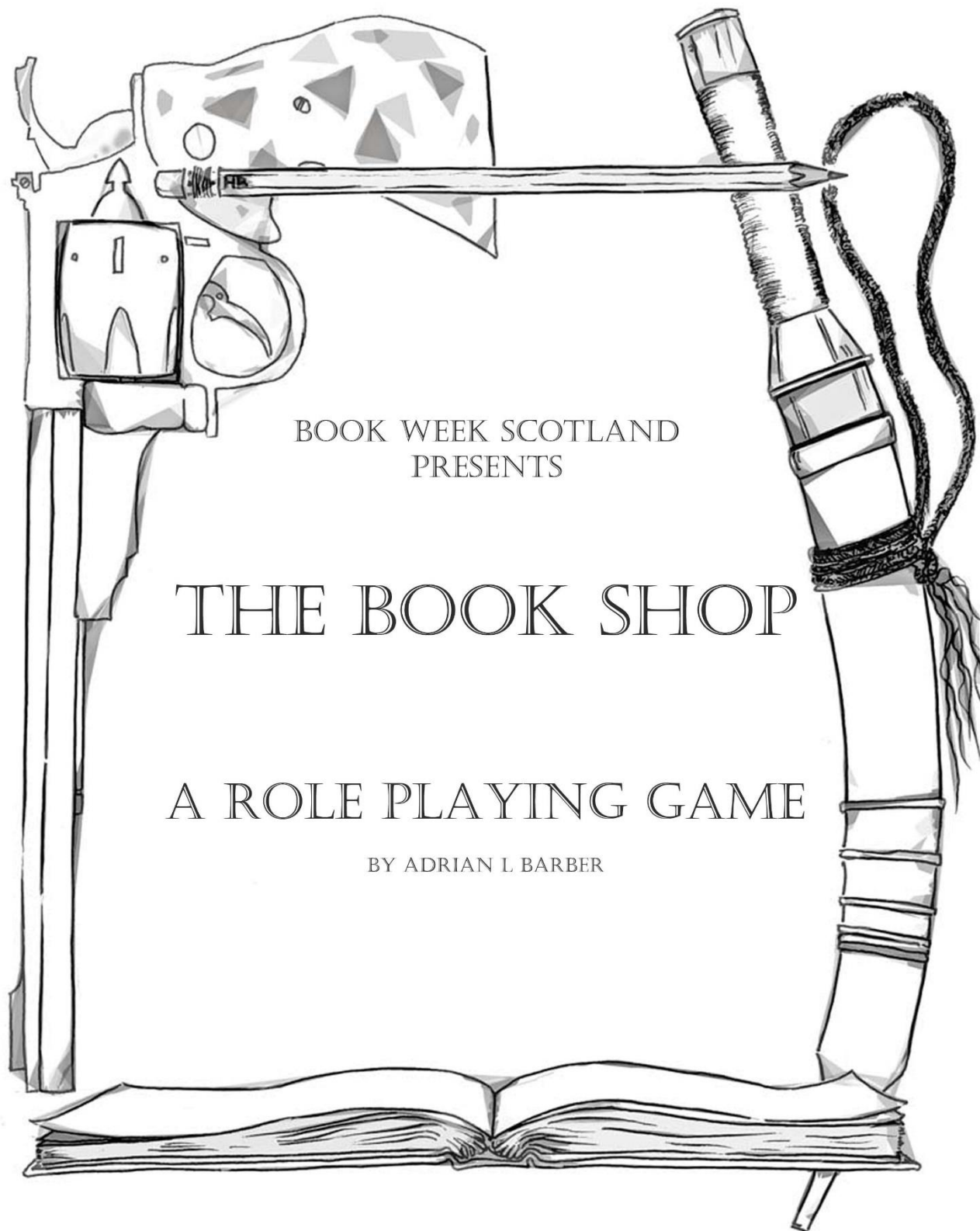


Scottish
Book Trust



BOOK WEEK SCOTLAND
PRESENTS

THE BOOK SHOP

A ROLE PLAYING GAME

BY ADRIAN L BARBER

Part One

Welcome to The Book Shop, Book Week Scotland's Role Playing Game.

This is a dice-less system written specifically for Book Week Scotland. It is aimed at the novice and aficionado alike.

You will need paper and pencil or electronic equivalent to keep track of the story you will create together and of the things you will find there.

This is **Part One**, for all players to download and read.

Part Two is for the **Bibliophile's eyes only**. The Bibliophile is, simply put, the person running the game and leading players through the adventure. More information on page 4.

Part Two also includes additional material containing ideas for other stories and how to run an RPG for younger players.

This game was designed as something you could play comfortably in a relatively short amount of time, in person or online in a conference call, such as Zoom or Discord.



Contents

What are Role Playing Games?	4
Players	4
Bibliophile	4
Creating a character	5
Character building	5
Luck	7
Describing the action	8
Adding dice	8
Equipment.....	9
Gifts.....	9
Advanced play	9
Campaign: balancing the books.....	10
Character sheet	11

What are Role Playing Games?

A Role Playing Game (RPG) is a story created by a group of people who make decisions and choices in an imagined world.

The players meet challenges and obstacles described by the person running the game and try to overcome them.

Role Playing Games allow you to take all those moments when you read a book or watch a film and think to yourself, 'I wouldn't have done that, there's a much better way!' and gives you that chance to try it your way.

Players

Players, sometimes known as PCs (Player Characters), are members of the team who create characters. They then play as those characters in the setting described by the person running the game (see Bibliophile, below).

They act as they believe their character would in any given situation.

For example, if your character was curious but cautious, they would probably avoid wandering into dangerous situations wherever possible. If they are bold and brawny, they might charge headlong into a fight.

Bibliophile

The curator of the story is called the Bibliophile.

This person will read the adventure and play the roles of the characters the players meet along the way. These are known as NPCs (Non-Player Characters).

In other games the role of the Bibliophile is often known as GM (Games Master), DM (Dungeon Master) or Keeper.

The Bibliophile will have the final say in your success or failure at a task, based on how well you tell your parts in the story and your character's chosen skills.



Creating a character

Most Role Playing Games have statistics for how good at things the characters are. For example, these might be categorised as Strength, Dexterity, Charm and Intelligence. These often have a numeric value and success at using these skills is determined by rolling some dice.

In this game there are no dice (unless you *really* want them, see **Adding dice** on page 8), you simply describe your character to the Bibliophile and they may amend your description if it seems unbalanced or too powerful. Balance is important as it brings a sense of challenge to the game. If you were great at everything, you would turn up and win and go home and there would not be much of a story.

During the start of the game, the players assemble at the (imagined) book shop and, with the help of a magic spell, will come up with the characters they want to send into an enchanted book. It is up to the Bibliophile to set any limits, but if they are happy with it, you might want to be anything from a cyborg from the future, a bow-wielding elf, a regular human confused as to how they got involved in all of this, a witch or wizard and so on. Let your imagination go wild!

While writing this game, play testing brought up some interesting variations on this. Originally, as above, players started out as themselves and were given the opportunity to create a character that would go into a book. This is built into the story provided for the Bibliophile in Part Two. However, some players, who already had a character in mind, wanted it to be those characters who walked into the book shop and went on the adventure.

Play the game in whichever way the group prefers. Both ways have worked in games run by the author and it was very interesting to see how events played out differently with a group who chose fantasy style skills and another who went for more everyday-life type of characters.

Character building

If you are struggling for a way to describe your character, idioms can be very useful.

Some examples of idioms:

- Sly as a fox
- Fit as a fiddle
- A cut above
- A scaredy-cat
- All over the map
- Bag of tricks
- Dark horse
- I'm all ears
- Quick as the wind

These all give quite a poetic ring to your skills or shortcomings. See **Advanced play** on Page 9 for more information.

Examples

An unlikely character would be:

1. ***As strong as an ox, mind like a steel trap. As light as a feather, nimble-fingered and beguiling to the senses.***

Perhaps a little more likely would be:

2. ***Their chiselled features hide an enquiring mind, they are slight and cannot carry a heavy load. Skilled with their fingers, they avoid a fight if they can.***

More obviously balanced (perhaps to the point of a stereotyped) character, would be:

3. ***As fit as a butcher's dog, they ask questions last. This rough exterior will take the stairs rather than the drainpipe and prefers a club to a letter opener.***

So, with Example 1, the Bibliophile might add, *'Well, that's how your character sees themselves, but others may disagree.'* They can then impose a limitation or ask the other players what they think.

Some responses to Example 1 could include:

'I get the feeling this character does not realise how much noise they make as they move around.'

'While it is good to be confident in your own skin, I'm not sure they are as appealing to the eye as they think they are.'

Example 2 is quite a good balance of strengths and weaknesses. So, the Bibliophile would move on to **Luck** (Page 7).

Example 3 is very much a stereotype of the Barbarian variety. This can work well, especially in a party of players who chose very different skill sets, but you might want to add something that gives a little more to the story, such as:

'This character has most people quaking in their boots, but what they don't see is that they are a keen gardener and are saddened to see a flower picked or an insect crushed underfoot.'

One of our play testers wanted us to stress that 'violence will not solve every problem', and that you need a variety of skills in your party of characters to get past different situations.

Once your character description is agreed with the Bibliophile, you will write it into the **Character sheet** (Page 11), under the **My character is** section.



Luck

It is very likely that from time-to-time the players will encounter a deadly or difficult task. If their combined skills do not seem to be a match for this, then **Luck** may come to their rescue.

Describe how lucky you are to the Bibliophile.

If we go back to Example 2, this character is in great danger of being overcome in any battle. They can choose a Luck description or skill, i.e. *'they avoid a fight if they can'* could become *'they are adept at sidestepping the average attacker'*.

A simpler way to describe this is to write *'dodge'* in the **Character sheet** box, **Luck**.

This will allow them to avoid an unpleasant situation that may arise, duck a missile or jump out of the way of a sword.

The player in Example 1 may not have learned their lesson yet and say, *'I'm renowned far and wide for my luck at the card table.'* A good line but again rather strong. For balance, the Bibliophile could add, *'yes, you do seem to have Lady Luck at your side quite often, but it is a shame you can never seem to hold onto your wealth.'*

The player in Example 3 could find luck with *'animal friends'*. If they are in dire peril, animals native to the area might come to their aid or a panicked creature that has been captured by the enemy can be made to calm down and thus avoid a fight.

Other examples of Luck skills

Happy accidents

If a player has a terrible event befall them, something positive comes out of it.

Guardian angel

Someone is looking out for them and in dire need will save them from a sticky end.

Describing the action

At the heart of this game is the simple mechanics of having fun with words.

Let's take our character from Example 2 on an adventure. We will call them Kay.

Let us imagine that the Bibliophile has just described an encounter outside a tower that Kay wants to climb. There are two guards patrolling the base of the tower. Some bushes and trees offer cover and thick ivy climbs the walls up to an open window, but this grumbling double act are good at their job and will spot all but the stealthiest of players.

One way for Kay to approach this is to say, *'I sneak into the bushes, climb the tree to a branch closest to the tower and jump to the ivy.'* That works fine, but there is more fun to be had and a much higher chance of success if you try to impress the Bibliophile:

Kay: *'So, here's my plan. I'm quite stealthy, but I want to make sure the guards' attention is elsewhere. I take a coin from my pocket and throw it near one of the guards.'*

Bibliophile: *'Okay, that's within your abilities. The shorter guard notices the coin, looks around and then moves to step on it. You guess he wants to pocket the coin quietly.'*

Kay: *'I take another coin, this time it is the lucky coin that I got back at the Inn. I will throw it at the shorter guard, then duck down in the bushes.'*

Bibliophile: *'You know it's a shame to say goodbye to that coin, but it is a wise decision to make sure this works. The lucky coin sails through the air and hits him on the nose. He cries out and the other guard notices and comes to investigate. They start to argue about who should get the money, forgetting that a coin just struck one of them in the heat of their squabble. Consider them distracted.'*

Kay: *'I slide further back into cover and carefully approach the tree. My aim is to climb it without shaking any limbs or disturbing any birds. Once I'm at a decent height, I want to look for a branch that will take my weight and see if there is a particularly thick patch of ivy that I could jump to and climb. I pause at each stage to check on the guards.'*

The Bibliophile is happy that Kay has taken adequate steps to succeed at their goal. The Bibliophile describes the pair of guards getting into an escalating row and allows Kay to arrive next to a window in the tower (possibly even having the lucky coin roll to the base of the tree, allowing Kay to scoop it up and pocket it, as a reward for thinking things through).

Adding dice

Some Games Masters and players love the element of chance that dice bring to a game. If you want to incorporate this into your adventure, we suggest a simple six-sided dice

system. For example, one of your players may tell you they are looking for a shovel. If they were doing this in a hardware shop, the chances are pretty high, so they would only need to roll a two or higher to succeed (one being an automatic fail, six being a resounding success). If they were expecting to find one just lying around in a rainforest, that's going to need a higher roll and, at the Bibliophile's discretion, a tale from the player to explain how on earth the shovel got there.



Equipment

The players' characters cannot take any equipment apart from the spell to bring back what should not be in the book. They can find equipment there and use it, but they may not bring it back to the 'real world' (book shop). They will likely arrive in suitable clothes for the period/genre or find such in a convenient container nearby.

Gifts

Gifts are temporary boosts to skills. For example, you might be rescuing a dear friend from a perilous situation and they bestow upon you a lucky pendant. This could be used up in one go, as a dramatic action, or simply worn to increase your chances at lesser tests of skill.

Examples of gifts:

- A four-leaf clover (adds to **Luck**)
- Lucky dagger (very likely to hit target)
- Walking stick of wonders (increases movement and speed)

Advanced play

Word play can be used to impress the Bibliophile and perhaps turn certain things to your advantage.

Idioms not only have their figurative, non-literal meaning, they can be used in other ways.

'As bright as a new pin' is often meant to suggest being clean and tidy, but 'bright' can be used for clever and 'pin' as sharp, so you could argue that your character not only scrubs up well, but also has a pointed mind.

This may go against the balance talked about earlier, so try not to overuse it. Or at least agree that this is the mechanic you are interested in engaging with and that everyone is prepared to have a go at it and that they are also happy to have it disputed.

Campaign: balancing the books

We hope that you and your players enjoy this game.

If you don't want the story to end after your first adventure, you can run what is commonly known as a **Campaign**.

This is a series of adventures under the umbrella of a story arc. You can find out more about creating a Campaign in Part Two after you've finished the game.

Remember to stop reading here if you're a Player Character – Part Two is for the Bibliophile's eyes only!

About the Author

Adrian L Barber has been playing, writing and illustrating games since the 1980s. He is a freelance artist, storyteller and model maker.

He was delighted when Scottish Book Trust's Philippa Cochrane and Nyla Ahmad asked him to create this game for Book Week Scotland.

He had the privilege to be the main carer for his two children as they made their way up to high school. This game is dedicated to them, his wife and to everyone who finds pure joy in entering the worlds we find inside books.

He would like to thank Hannah Sycamore, Petko Nekezov, Ella McLellan and Chris Leslie for volunteering to play this game during its development. Their participation was of invaluable help.

Book Week Scotland is an annual celebration of books and reading that takes place across the country. Book Week Scotland 2021 will take place 15–21 November and is supported by Creative Scotland and SLIC.

Character sheet

EX LIBRIS: _____ NAME _____

My Character Is :

LUCK: _____

Notes: _____

What I have found: _____